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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (6/05): ISRAELI AND US ELECTIONS
"FREEZE" PEACE PROCESS

Main Stories:

All front pages carry negative reports about Israeli plans to, "renew [Israel's] settlement campaign in Jerusalem." Al-Quds reports that the timing of the "settlement campaign" is meant to come just before the June 2 meeting of Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli Premier Olmert. Angry comments by Palestinian Authority (PA) officials appear in the dailies: Palestinian Presidency spokesperson Abu Rudaynah states, "This is a real threat to the peace process." Al-Ayyam calls the plans a, "settlement attack on Jerusalem." All dailies quote PLO negotiator Sa'eb Erekat announcing that, "settlements, negotiations and the truce will all be on the agenda of [the June 2] meeting between Olmert and Abbas."

Violence grabs headlines: 12 Palestinians were injured during a protest, "against the wall" in N'ilin village near the West Bank city of Ramallah, according to the dailies. The papers also highlight the injuring of three Palestinians and an Israeli soldier during an Israeli military operation in Gaza on May 1. Papers also report that Israeli police have, "heightened the security alert" in Jerusalem because of activities linked to the Israeli celebration of, "Jerusalem day," a national holiday celebrating the "reunification" of the city in 1967. Related coverage highlights an "attack" by Israeli authorities on Palestinians gathered in East Jerusalem at a June 2 commemoration ceremony for deceased Palestinian Authority advisor on Jerusalem affairs, Faisal Al-Hussayn.

Front pages devote extensive, positive coverage to the homecoming of Lebanese civilian Nassim Nasr on June 1, following his release from an Israeli jail. Nasr served a six-year prison term on charges of

spying for Hezbollah Reports note that Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails are encouraged by the action, hoping that a prisoner exchange deal may happen soon. Photos of Lebanese celebrating the release also appear on the front pages.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida's front page reports that PLO member Yaser Abd Rabbo confirmed that the appointment of a vice president to the Palestinian Authority and the PLO is a proposal currently under consideration.

Reports about a truce between Hamas and Israel continue to attract front page headlines. Al-Quds reports that Hamas denied receiving any, "official Israeli response" to a truce proposal. Hamas also announced its readiness to start immediate national talks with Fatah and other Palestinian parties. Meanwhile Hamas repeated its threats to end the "siege" on Gaza. Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoom commented that, "the breaking of the siege could come at any moment and the world will be caught off guard." At the same time, Hamas denied reports that Egyptian authorities would soon reopen the Gaza-Egypt Rafah crossing.

Al-Ayyam's front page reports that former American diplomats met with former Hamas Premier Haniyya in Gaza on June 1. Al Quds carries an inside story. The stories note the visiting Americans confirming that they did not, "ask anyone's permission," to travel to Gaza and that they had, "serious and open negotiations," with Haniyya.

Ma'an New agency reports that German Foreign Minister Steinmeier is scheduled to visit Jenin district on June 2, together with a high-level Palestinian delegation including Palestinian Prime

JERUSALEM 00000923 002 OF 003

Minister Salam Fayyad. Related coverage in the dailies, reports on a June 1 meeting between Fayyad and a European Union delegation in Ramallah. According to reports, Fayyad discussed Israeli measures and settlement expansion.

The dailies reported on the visit of US General Fraser to Nablus. The dailies positively highlighted that General Fraser met with local businessmen and was given a briefing by Nablus Governor Jamal Muhaysin on economic, political and security issues.

Weekend stories

Sunday, June 1, 2008

The front pages of the three dailies carried extensive coverage on Israeli "settlement plans" for Jerusalem continuing coverage from May 31 about building tenders announced by Israeli Housing Minister Boim on May 30. Al-Quds reported that 1,420 new units will be added to the Jerusalem area settlements of Har Homa and Pisgat Ze'ev. Al-Ayyam reported the number of new housing at 820. Related coverage on Al-Ayyam's front page also revealed statistics from an Israeli study showing that the number of, "Palestinians is increasing in Jerusalem. They form 34% of its population."

The dailies reported that a "storm" erupted over celebrity U.S. chef Rachael Ray wearing a kaffiyah. The front page of Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reported that Dunkin' Donuts has pulled an online advertisement featuring Ray after criticism from conservative groups in the U.S. over her choice of scarf.

Saturday May 31, 2008

The front pages carried a neutral to positive article responding to the New York Times article about Fulbright grants being withdrawn from Gaza students. The dailies highlighted that Secretary Rice is "investigating" a decision that was made by the State Department on this issue. All dailies highlighted Washington's, "pressure to secure," the traveling of seven students from Gaza to study in the United States. Al-Quds reported in a red box that the State Department will resume Fulbright scholarships for Gaza students. All dailies carried the full text of the May 30 NY Times article. The

dailies reported that the State Department issued a statement saying that, "the United States will not give up on innocent people living in Gaza," adding that, "communications will continue with the Israeli Government to enable these students to travel."

All dailies carried the US Consulate General Jerusalem's press release about the donation of 700 books and 100 magazines to the Community Center in Salfit on inside pages. The dailies quoted Public Diplomacy Officer Jacqueline Deley stating that, "we are delighted to provide these books that came entirely from the private collections of staff and families of the U.S. Consulate." The Deputy Governor, Mr. Souf, thanked the U.S. Consulate for its generosity and support for the people of Salfit, according to the reports.

The front page of Al-Quds carried the results of an opinion poll that shows that 73% of respondents trust Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The poll was conducted by the Near East Company for Consultation in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. The poll also showed that 65% of respondents oppose the resignation of the President; 37% support Fatah; 13% support Hamas; 6% support other

JERUSALEM 00000923 003 OF 003

Palestinian factions; 75% of respondents support signing a final peace agreement with Israel.

BLOCK QUOTES:

¶1. Independent daily Al-Ayyam runs an op-ed by veteran columnist Talal Okal entitled, "After Barak... Olmert loses his chance" (6/02): "...Olmert cannot go to Washington and ask for its support in the middle of his current crisis unless he achieves some progress in his meeting with Palestinian Authority President Abbas... Bush showed unlimited support to Israel when he visited to celebrate its 60th anniversary, which was also a show of [U.S.] support for Olmert... But the question is, can Olmert, who is weak... really pull off a historic or significant break-through while he is losing the confidence [of everyone] everywhere he goes..."

¶2. Independent daily Al-Ayyam runs an op-ed by veteran columnist Samih Shbaib entitled, "Early elections and the contours of the Israeli political map!" (6/02): "It is practically an established fact that early Israeli elections will take place soon. As a result, political Israeli parties have begun preliminary moves towards elections including the Kadima party... we can infer that the current state of the Israeli political map, after Olmert's scandals and his preliminary surrender, is very tentative and likely to change... Israel will experience a string of changing... foreign policy. It will not be able to negotiate neither with the Palestinians nor the Syrians. This situation will be accompanied by a frozen U.S. foreign policy until the beginning of next year. This raises very serious questions about how to deal with Palestinian negotiations and realign Palestinian national efforts with the national interest."

WALLES